

*Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the
Rural District of Leeds (Roundhay and Seacroft) for
the twelve months ended December 31st, 1906.*

The deaths registered in the district during the past year amount altogether to 165; two deaths of residents (in public institutions, while away from home) have been reported to me by Medical Officers of Health, in addition, making the total 167. Of these, 125 are of patients in the Leeds Fever Hospital, none of whom belonged to our district; of the remaining 42, the number is further diminished by the fact that six were suicides in Roundhay Park, none of whom were residents, so that the corrected total of deaths belonging to the Leeds Rural District Council area is 36: of these, 15 are Seacroft deaths, the remaining 20 belong to Roundhay.

At the middle of the year 1906, I calculate the population of Roundhay to have been 2,420; of Seacroft, 1,170; and of the permanent staff of the Fever Hospitals—nurses, and servants of all kinds with their families, 150. In stating the gross death rate, I allow for the patients also, inasmuch as they would be counted in the census. For any other purpose they may be neglected, and I reckon the population, therefore, in all other statistics at 3,740. The gross death rate, then, is 41·2 per thousand—figures which are wholly misleading. The real death rate, i.e., excluding all non-residents, and including residents who have died away from home, is 9·6 per thousand. The separate rate of Roundhay is 8·7, very nearly; that of Seacroft, 11·3.

The births have been 51: 21 Roundhay cases, 30 Seacroft. The rate for the whole district is 13·6 per thousand inhabitants: for Roundhay, 8·7, very nearly; for Seacroft, approximately, 23. Of infantile deaths, three occurred in Roundhay, two in Seacroft. I think it of value to discriminate between deaths under this heading which are due to ante- and to post-natal causes respectively: thus two of the Roundhay deaths, and one of the Seacroft, appear to have been due to ante-natal causes, a fact which, from one point of view, discounts the very alarming look of the infantile death rate, viz., for each thousand born, 98 for the whole district; Roundhay's rate being 142 per thousand, and Seacroft's 66.

No deaths from zymotic diseases, other than tuberculosis, have occurred. From tuberculous disease there have been two deaths: one in either district. The tubercular death rate is therefore ·5 per mille, i.e., using tuberculosis in the sense of tubercle of any organ and not limiting it to the narrow sense in which the word phthisis is used, viz., tubercle of the lungs.

It will be noticed that the births and deaths in Roundhay exactly balance, and that any increase in that part of our district this year must be due to immigration. The fact is sufficiently startling without comment; inasmuch as Roundhay is by no means a place altogether inhabited by elderly people who have retired, like Cheltenham or other places, where there is no *à priori* likelihood of an average birth rate, this exceptionally low rate is not due to any natural infertility. In Seacroft, as will be seen from the table, the rate has been declining for some time, but not to the same extent. On the other hand, the death rate is highly satisfactory, though it is to be borne in mind that it has been lower than ever all over the United Kingdom this year; so that it was to be expected that our district would show the general tendency. I have not known so small a number of

deaths in Seacroft, and rarely so low a rate in Roundhay. And of the 36 deaths of residents, no less than six were over 80 years of age, while five more had reached the decade 70 to 80. The most startling feature in the list of deaths is the frequency of cancer as a cause of death; seven people out of the 36 have died from this disease. That cancer is on the increase I think there can be no manner of doubt. Fifty years ago it must have been rare for a man in general practice to be attending at one time seven people with cancer, as it has been my own lot during a part of this year, all of whom were in a neighbouring district, save one; and that out of 36 deaths in one year seven should be due to this cause, is disquieting to a degree. And it is certainly attacking at an earlier stage of life than it used to do: only one of our cases has reached the age of 70. To put it more strikingly still, 12 people died between the ages of 40 and 65, and six of these deaths were due to cancer. The theory that obtained some years ago, viz., that the disease favoured certain localities or certain houses, finds no corroboration here: I can not find that two cases have occurred in any one house in Roundhay or Seacroft, during the last twelve years; nor can I trace any special incidence in specific streets or roads. Surgical operations are to-day on a far bolder, and on a far larger scale than they were 20 or 30 years ago; it is, therefore, certain that more cases are cured—and if not cured, have their lives prolonged—than used to be, so that it may be that a number have fallen in this year's lists that under older conditions would have been diffused over the records of two or three years previous. But the fact cuts two ways: it may account for a greater number of deaths occurring in any one year, but it also implies a greater prevalence of the disease, for at any given time there are sure to be living cases of cancer cured, or of lives being ended more slowly though not less surely.

In other respects there is little to record this year. The low death rate has been accompanied by its necessary implication—a low sickness rate. In the late autumn it was necessary to close the infant department of the Seacroft school on account of a very wide-spread epidemic of chicken-pox; but with this trifling exception, there has been no general break in the health of the district.

Your sanitary inspector and I have made a systematic house-to-house inspection of all the cottages in your district, the notes of which will be laid before you. In the course of such an enquiry, one comes upon a number of defects which would never otherwise appear; but as a whole, the working-class houses here will compare not unfavourably with houses of the same class in other rural districts, save under very exceptional conditions. But that is a low standard to begin with. The defects we have to show are, many of them, remediable, and doubtless will be remedied. But such remedy falls far short of furnishing good houses. The longer one lives in the country the more obvious it seems that the gain of the working country man's family as against the town dweller's in the same social conditions consists solely in this, that the former live more out of their houses, and have out-doors a larger and a purer air than the latter; within doors the conditions are much the same; if they differ it is often in favour of the town. A labourer with a family of more than two has very rarely sufficient sleeping accommodation to allow for fresh air, much less for separation of the sexes, which latter fact often bears disastrous fruit in country life. Since the crusade against tuberculosis started, there is a marked change of attitude towards "the open window" in the class of which I am speaking. But often there cannot be enough air admitted into bedrooms such as you frequently find in country cottages. One very usual arrangement is that what is really a landing at the head of the staircase leading out of the scullery, has got to do duty for a bedroom where two or three sleep. It may be only in one place can you stand upright, and except for the air from the scullery, there is no means of ventilation but by a window some two feet square, half of which may or may not be removable. Another very frequent fault is a stone flag floor laid directly on the soil, which is necessarily damp; sometimes the floor level is below the level of the road. Nor is there commonly flagging enough laid near the houses—in wet weather the cottager may have to wade through a regular slough to his home. Damp is after all perhaps the chief factor in shortening a country labourer's life. There is no doubt that these conditions are ameliorating; there is equally no doubt that the difficulty is mainly a financial one. Philanthropy at the hands of an individual,

or of a council, which does not pay commercially, will in the long run harm him who receives and him who gives. Piling on rates to make good cottages for working men must tend ultimately to depreciate, if not money wages, at least the real wage, and therefore to a lower standard of living in other directions. This effect can be already (not dimly) seen in the towns, and it is my hope that we shall not see building undertaken by councils in the country districts on any large scale. The practical hope out of the difficulty seems to be in the finding of cheaper materials and cheaper methods, so as to allow of the erection of good roomy cottages which shall return a fair profit for the outlay. This is certain, that any drastic legislation to compel the erection in country districts of working-class houses at the public expense, is quite likely, ultimately, to accentuate the very evil it is intended to remove.

All the dairy-farms have been as usual systematically visited and inspected. None are bad, some distinctly good. The one of which I have had frequently to complain to you has been very materially improved again, though I believe it to be the fact that the expense has been borne wholly by the tenant. I had hoped last year to start a system of prizes for the farm or farms which should most nearly reach the ideal of cleanliness in all the preparations of milk for the market. I was, however, advised by experts that the attempt would be useless, for that "union rules," so to speak, would prevent farmers from entering for the prize, or profiting by the prize if they did so enter. I still think, however, a method which appeals to Bentham's principle of "Enlightened Self-Interest," is far more likely to do good than any amount of official supervision or compulsion. If the consumer is educated to know that certain farmers produce better milk than others, it will come to pass that such a farmer can get better—or that at any rate inferior qualities will not be able to fetch an equal—price; that therefore all will be forced up to a higher average standard. Once people see that it is ridiculous that they should have to boil their milk, the thing is done. It is the education of the public that is the best safeguard. For example, any one can see that any good that the crusade against tuberculosis has done in the immediate saving of life is trifling compared with its educative value in habituating the man in the street with the perception that tubercle is an infectious disease, and therefore avoidable once the means of avoiding it are known. And if the customer knows that milk need not be a culture medium of micro-organisms, and knows where to get it pure, not only will the dairy-farmer be forced to observe rigid cleanliness, but it will pay him to do so. There has not been found any tubercle in the milk of cows in our district for six years, nor have I seen any disease of the udder during that time.

The sewage system has worked admirably, but a difficulty is caused at times by storm water; a method of dealing with it separately is being considered.

There has been no addition to the number of slaughterhouses, which is, as it has been for years four. There is nothing to add to what I have said before, viz., that they are well kept, though only two are structurally good. Meat sold in the district is invariably of good quality; I find that country folk cannot be readily deceived in this matter, and anything suspicious must go elsewhere.

There are two places in the district which rank as "factories" by reason of the fact that they employ steam power, or gas engines. One is a wheelwright's workshop, and is wholly private, being worked by three brothers in partnership. An alteration I recommended last year, viz., the fencing-off of a dangerous part of the machinery, has been carried out. The other is really equally domestic, being the workplace of a hay and straw dealer, who chops for himself, and very occasionally for a neighbour; equally occasionally he gives a job to a man as he needs it, in the tendance of the steam engine, which is of a somewhat antiquated type. The machine is not fenced-off, but it would require a good deal of ingenuity to get in way of harm. These are both in Seacroft. Of workplaces, there are but two bakeshops: one of these is underground, but the conditions are good, and it is licensed by you. One apprentice is kept by the proprietors, aunt and niece; the place is scrupulously clean. The other is built out behind the shop and house, one apprentice is kept; the bakeshop is whitewashed twice

yearly, but cleanliness is not at all times conspicuous; there is no other fault to find. There is one other workshop which calls for real supervision, as being by no means domestic. This is a dressmaker's, at Roundhay, where between 10 and 15 hands are employed, the youngest being 14 years of age at this date. There are two workrooms, one above the other, communicating by a staircase; the upper room is only used in exceptionally busy times. The open staircase may be a possible source of nuisance by reason of the passage of used air from the room below, which is always fully occupied, but there is ample opportunity of ventilation in the room itself, apart from this; the women seem perfectly healthy; and there is no other fault to find. Another workshop of the same kind is at Seacroft, where two sisters employ two, or in summer, three girls, the youngest 16; the workshop is an ordinary cottage ground-floor room, the upstairs chamber being used for a fitting room; there is no call for any special remark. There are three other workplaces of the same kind in the district, each of which employ one worker from outside. I have no lists of out-workers.

B. BASKETT, M.B., Oxon.